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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2229  
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1214  
RUEHNNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 0806  
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CLDP (TEJTEL)  
CASABLANCA FOR FCS (ORTIZ)  
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SUBJECT: Erroneous Media Reports of a U.S./Tunisia Free Trade Agreement

REF: Tunis 2771

11. (U) Local news media recently published an article indicating that despite a relative slowdown of talks between the two parties, the U.S. and Tunisia were exploring opportunities aimed at concluding a Free Trade Agreement and mentioning that work groups have been set up to look into the services sector and IPR. It was also reported that in order to conclude an FTA with the United States, Tunisia would have to be willing to undertake some difficult commitments in such fields as updating their judicial system in order to promote transparency and to encourage the participation of the private sector in the process. This was followed a few days later by the publication of an erroneous Italian Press Agency article indicating that the United States and Tunisia had signed an FTA.

12. (SBU) On querying the Ministry of Development and International Cooperation (MDIC) about the probable source of these articles, Econoff was told that the Italian press article was probably just a bad translation of the Tunisian article. According to MDIC, the Tunisian piece was "obviously" written by "a well-informed source or a person who knows exactly what has been achieved within the TIFA process so far."

13. (SBU) Comment: Given that the GOT to a large degree controls the domestic media, the publication of such an article is not a coincidence. Rather, it may represent a GOT signal of renewed interest in the TIFA process. In this regard, Post will continue to watch closely to see whether the removal of pirated optical discs (Reftel) will be extended throughout the retail sector. Post will also watch for other indications that the GOT is serious about reinvigorating the TIFA process. End Comment.

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